



Pendle Education Trust

Policy/Procedure/Guideline Review

Policy/Procedure/Guideline:	Complaints Procedure
Senior Manager Responsible:	Clerk to the Trust
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Pendle Education Trust

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Company Registration Number: 08263591

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PET Complaints Procedure

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Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to listen to and respond to any concerns or complaints about the facilities or services we provide. This procedure is available not only to parents and or carers of children that are registered at the school, but also to any person, including members of the public and anyone else who wishes to raise a concern. We recognise that making a complaint can sometimes feel difficult, and we are committed to ensuring complaints are dealt with care, respect and openness. Where a concern or complaint is not covered by another separate statutory procedure, (such as an appeals or relating to exclusions or admissions,) we will use this complaints procedure to help ensure matters are considered fairly and that, wherever possible, we work together to find a constructive resolution.

Our students' experience is important to everyone at our school. We want to work together with you to ensure they are happy at school, and that they achieve their best. If you feel something has gone wrong, we want to hear from you.

You should let us know about any problem within three months of it happening; we cannot normally look into older problems. The Department for Education expect complaints to be made at the earliest opportunity and consider three months to be an acceptable timeframe to lodge a complaint. We will always try to keep to the time scales set out here, but for complex queries it may take longer to reply. We will let you know if this is the case.

The Trust and its academies reserve the right not to investigate complaints that have been made three months after the subject of the complaint took place, except in exceptional circumstances. What is meant by exceptional circumstances is where new evidence has come to light, where the complaint is of an especially serious matter or where there is reasonable justification for why the complainant has been unable to raise the complaint before this time. The Principal or CEO will review the situation and decide whether or not to enact the complaints procedure, informing the chair of the governors or the Trust of the decision.

Concern or complaint

A concern is when someone feels worried or unsure about something important and would like reassurance, further information or help to put things right. A complaint is when someone feels dissatisfied with something that has happened, or with something they feel should have happened but did not. We welcome both concerns and complaints as opportunities to listen, understand and work together to resolve matters wherever possible.

1. Which procedure do I need?

We know that it is not always easy to know which procedure is the right one to use. Some concerns are best dealt with through a different, more specific policy, and this helps to make sure that they are handled in the most appropriate and helpful way. The list below explains which policy applies to particular types of complaint. These policies are available on the academy website, and if you would like a copy or need help finding the right information, please contact the main academy reception, where a member of staff will be happy to help.

- Student admissions; please see the academy's Admissions Policy
- Student exclusions; please see the academy's Behaviour Policy
- Staff grievance, capability or disciplinary; these are covered by the academy's grievance, capability or disciplinary procedure.



- Where the complaint concerns a third party used by the Trust or academy; please complain directly to the third party themselves.
- Anonymous complaints – please refer to the whistleblowing policy.
- Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information Requests – please see the Trust's General Data Protection Regulations and Freedom of Information policies.

2. Safeguarding

If a complaint suggests that a child may be at risk or that their wellbeing or safety may be affected, the academy or Trust will act promptly and with care. Our first priority will always be to help keep children safe. In these circumstances, we may need to share the concern immediately with the local authority so that the right support and safeguarding steps can be taken. Any action will follow the academy's safeguarding policy, which is available on the relevant academy website.

3. Social Media

To help us resolve concerns as quickly, fairly and constructively as possible, we kindly ask that complaints are not discussed publicly on social media, including platforms such as Facebook and X/Twitter. We understand that people may feel upset or frustrated when raising a concern but keeping the matter private helps us to listen properly, protect everyone's confidentiality and work with you towards the best possible resolution. Complaints will be handled sensitively and confidentially by the academy or Trust, and we ask that complainants also respect the privacy of everyone involved.

4. Stage one – Talk to us

It's always best to begin by speaking with the class teacher, subject teacher or member of staff directly involved in the problem as soon as you can, letting them know what has happened and what you would like us to do to make it better. They will get back to you as soon as they can, usually within 5 school days.

5. Stage two – Write to us

If you still have concerns, you can write to us with a formal complaint. When you write, include brief details of what happened, who was involved, who you've already spoken to, and what you would like us to do next.

You don't need to write a long letter – in fact, keeping it short usually helps us reply more quickly. We have a form at the end of this document that asks for the details we need. We will let you know we have received your query within five school days. If your letter is unclear to us, we may request a meeting or call first to ensure we have understood your concern before responding in writing. We will tell you if we need any more information.

Where the Principal is the subject of the complaint then section 7 of this procedure applies.

The Principal will make sure that your complaint is looked into carefully and fairly. They may carry out the investigation themselves or ask another senior member of staff to do this on



their behalf. The person investigating will consider the information provided, gather any further details needed, and share their findings with the Principal, who will then decide the outcome based on the evidence. In some cases, it may be more appropriate for the Chief Executive Officer to oversee the investigation or appoint another senior member of staff to do so.

The investigator will keep a clear note of any conversations or interviews that take place during the investigation, so that the information shared is recorded accurately and fairly. To help them fully understand the concern, the details of the complaint and any relevant background, the investigator may ask to meet with the complainant first. This meeting is intended to provide an opportunity to talk through the matter, ask any helpful questions and make sure the concern has been understood properly. Where notes are taken during an interview, these will usually be shared with the person interviewed so they can check that the notes are accurate. Asking for checked notes to be signed and dated is considered best practice.

At the end of the investigation, the investigator will prepare a report setting out what they have found, along with any recommendations or actions they feel should be considered by the Principal. This report will help the Principal understand the matter fully and decide on the most appropriate way forward.

The Principal will write to you within five school days of receiving your letter to confirm who will be looking into your complaint. They will then write to you again, normally within a further 20 school days, to explain what steps have been taken to investigate the matter and to share the findings. Some complaints may take longer to look into properly, particularly where they are more complex. If this is the case, we will let you know and keep you updated, so that you understand what is happening and when you can expect a response.

Before the investigator speaks with any member of staff as part of the investigation, the member of staff will be told that they may be accompanied by a colleague or by a representative from a recognised union or professional association. This is to help ensure that staff feel supported and that the process is handled fairly and respectfully.

After considering your complaint, we will then give you a formal reply setting out our response and any actions we have taken or plan to take, usually within 25 school days of receiving your written complaint.

We will let you know about any actions that will be taken as a result of your complaint, wherever we are able to do so. In some situations, there may be information that we cannot share because it is confidential, such as any formal action involving individual members of staff. Where this applies, we will still aim to explain the outcome as clearly and helpfully as possible, while respecting everyone's privacy.

In the outcome letter, we will also explain what you can do if you remain unhappy with the outcome of the investigation. If you feel that the complaint has not been handled properly, you may ask for the Complaints Review Panel to review the process followed by the Principal when considering your complaint.

If you would like the matter to be considered at Stage Three, please write to the Trust Clerk within 20 school days of receiving the Principal's outcome letter. It would be helpful if you could explain why you are asking for the review, including any concerns you have about how the complaint was handled and/or the reasons you remain dissatisfied. This will help the Complaints Review Panel understand your concerns clearly and consider the matter as fairly as possible.



6. Where the complaint is about the actions of the Principal, Chief Education Officer or Chief Executive Officer

If your complaint is about the actions of the Principal, Chief Education Officer or Chief Executive Officer, we will follow the same complaints procedure used for complaints about individual academies, so that the matter is considered fairly and consistently. At Stage Two, please send your correspondence to the Clerk to the Trust, who will make sure your complaint is passed to the right person to consider it. This will help ensure that your concern is handled appropriately, sensitively and by someone with the right responsibility to look into the matter. Your stage 2 correspondence should be sent to the Clerk to the Trust addressed to: -

- Chief Education Officer if the complaint is relating to the principal
- Chief Executive Officer if the complaint is relating to the Chief Education Officer
- Chair of the Trust if the complaint is relating to the Chief Executive Officer

7. Stage Three – Meet with a review panel (All Complaints)

Where we can't reach agreement, you can ask for a formal meeting to discuss your complaint, called a panel hearing. You must request an appeal in writing within twenty school days of receiving the decision after the formal investigation or it will not be considered, except in exceptional circumstances.

The Clerk to the Complaint Review Panel will write to you within five school days to confirm that your request has been received. They will also explain what will happen next and let you know about any further steps, so that you are clear about how the review will move forward.

The panel will include at least three people not directly involved in the complaint, including one person who is independent of the management and running of the school. You don't have to attend but if you want to, we will do our best to agree a time and date with you for the meeting, usually within [25] school days. The meeting will usually be in person, but it can be held online if that is more convenient for everyone.

We will share all supporting evidence and paperwork with panel members and those attending the meeting at least five school days before the meeting. This is to give everyone time to read the information carefully and prepare for the discussion. To help the meeting run fairly and smoothly, late papers or written evidence will not normally be considered unless there are exceptional circumstances.

As well as the three panel members, we will invite the following people to attend the meeting so that the panel can hear from those directly involved and understand the matter as fully and fairly as possible:

- You the complainant, who may bring someone with them for support if they wish.
- The person responsible for overseeing the stage two complaint

The Review Panel can make the following decisions:

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- Uphold the complaint in whole or part
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint



- Recommend changes to the Trust or academy's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not reoccur

After the meeting, the review panel will send their recommendations to you and to anyone you have complained about. The school and the Trust will also get a copy.

This is the final stage at which the academy or Trust will consider your complaint. If you remain dissatisfied after the Complaint Review Panel has considered the matter, you may wish to contact the external organisation listed at the end of this document. Although the academy or Trust will not be able to consider the same complaint further through this procedure, we hope the process will have helped to listen to your concerns carefully, consider them fairly and explain the outcome as clearly as possible.

8. Complaints against a governor, the local academy council, a trustee or the Trust Board

Stage 1: informal

Complaints made against any member of the local academy council should be directed to the clerk in the first instance.

If the complaint is about one member of the local academy council (including the chair or vice-chair), a suitably skilled and impartial governor will carry out the steps at stage 1 (set out in section 5 above).

If the complaint is about a member of the Trust Board (including the chair or vice-chair), a suitably skilled and impartial trustee will carry out the steps at stage 1 (set out in section 5 above).

Stage 2: formal

If the complaint is about the chair and vice-chair of the local academy council together, the whole local academy council, or the majority of the local academy council, a trustee will look into the complaint at Stage Two. The trustee will be appointed by the Trust Board and will consider the matter carefully and fairly, following the steps set out in section 6 above. Once the investigation has been completed, they will write to you with a formal response explaining the outcome.

If the complaint is about the chair and vice-chair of the Trust Board together, the whole Trust Board, or the majority of the Trust Board, an independent investigator will look into the complaint at Stage Two. The investigator will be appointed by the Trust Board and will consider the matter carefully, fairly and independently, following the steps set out in section 6 above. Once the investigation has been completed, they will write to you with a formal response explaining the outcome.

Stage 3: review panel

If the complaint is jointly about the chair and vice-chair, the local academy council or the majority of the local academy council, a committee of trustees including an independent panel member will hear the complaint.

If the complaint is jointly about the chair and vice-chair of the Trust Board, the entire Trust Board or the majority of the Trust Board, a committee of independent governors/trustees will



hear the complaint. They will be sourced from local schools, local academy trusts or the local authority and will carry out the steps at stage 3 (set out in section 8 above).

9. Reporting and Recording Complaints

We will keep a written record of all formal complaints centrally at Pendle Education Trust. This helps us make sure that complaints are recorded carefully and consistently, including the stage at which each complaint was resolved and any action taken by the academy as a result. This applies whether or not the complaint was upheld.

If a complaint reaches Stage Three, the findings and recommendations of the Review Panel will be shared in writing with everyone directly involved. A copy will also be available for inspection at the academy premises by a representative of Pendle Education Trust and the Principal. This helps ensure that the outcome is recorded clearly and that the process remains fair, transparent and accountable.

We will keep all correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints confidential and will handle this information with care. This helps protect the privacy of everyone involved. Information will only be shared where it is appropriate or required, such as if the Secretary of State or a body carrying out an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act asks to see it.

10. Using AI

Some people like to use AI tools to help organise their thoughts. Whilst we do not recommend the use of AI tools for the reasons set out below, we recognise that they may help some people to communicate their concerns more easily. We recommend against using public AI tools because they can store and republish personal information, such as sensitive details about your child. AI tools can also introduce inaccurate information, like old rules or laws from other countries. This can delay us responding to you. You should always carefully check the output to make sure it is accurate.

Where a complaint includes references to legislation or statutory guidance that are false, outdated, from another jurisdiction, or otherwise irrelevant, including references generated through the use of artificial intelligence, we reserve the right to disregard those elements of the complaint. We may also ask that the complaint be resubmitted with those references removed, or with only current, accurate and relevant references included.

If we are finding it difficult to clearly identify the key concerns from what you have shared, we may suggest a meeting or call to help us focus on what matters most and respond as accurately and helpfully as possible.

11. Dealing with unreasonable, serial or persistent complaints

Pendle Education Trust and its academies are committed to listening to complaints carefully, treating people fairly and impartially, and providing a helpful and high-quality service to anyone who raises a concern. We will not normally limit the contact that complainants have with the school and will always seek to work constructively with them. However, we also have a clear duty to protect the wellbeing of our staff and school community. We therefore cannot accept behaviour that is abusive, offensive, threatening or otherwise unacceptable,



and we will take appropriate action where this is needed to keep staff safe and ensure the complaints process can continue fairly.

Pendle Education Trust considers a complaint to be unreasonable where the frequency, tone or nature of a person's contact makes it difficult for the academy or Trust to consider their complaint fairly or affects our ability to respond to other people's complaints. We will always try to work constructively with complainants and support them through the process, but we also need to make sure that staff time is used appropriately and that all complaints can be handled fairly, respectfully and without unnecessary delay.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- Refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the Academy's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically: -

- maliciously
- aggressively
- using threats, intimidation or violence
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language
- knowing it to be false
- using falsified information
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers



To help us deal with complaints fairly and without unnecessary delay, we ask complainants to keep communication with the academy reasonable and focused while a complaint is being considered. Repeated or excessive contact by letter, phone, email or text can make it harder to resolve the matter promptly and may delay the outcome. Wherever possible, the Principal or Chair of the local academy council will first talk through any concerns informally with the complainant before deciding whether the complaint should be treated as unreasonable.

In most cases, we work well with parents to resolve concerns. We recognise that emotions can run high, but we expect communication to remain respectful. Where behaviour becomes unreasonable, abusive, or intimidating, or where there is a refusal to engage with the policy and process, it can be harder for us to support a resolution. In these cases, we may suspend consideration of a complaint or place proportionate restrictions on how we manage contact.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include barring an individual from the Academy.

Complainants who behave in an unacceptable way

Although schools carry out an important public role, academy premises are private places and the public does not have an automatic right of entry. Our academies will always seek to be welcoming and respectful, but they must also remain safe and secure places for pupils, staff and everyone in the school community. For this reason, we may need to take appropriate action where behaviour gives cause for concern, so that the academy continues to be a safe, calm and supportive environment for all.

If a parent's or visitor's behaviour gives us cause for concern, the academy may ask them to leave the school premises. This will only be done where it is considered necessary to help keep pupils, staff and others safe, and to maintain a calm and respectful environment. In more serious cases, the Principal or the Trust may write to the person to explain that their permission to come onto school premises has been temporarily withdrawn. Before a final decision is made, the person will be given the opportunity to share their views in writing, so that these can be considered fairly.

The decision to bar will then be reviewed carefully, taking into account any written comments or representations made by the parent or visitor. The decision will either be confirmed or withdrawn. If the decision is confirmed, the parent or visitor will be informed in writing and told how long the bar will remain in place. Anyone who wishes to complain about being barred may do so in writing, by letter or email, to the Principal or Chair of the Local Academy Council.

12. Publication of the Complaints Procedure

The Complaints Procedure is available in writing to parents of pupils from the reception office on each Academy site. It will also be published:

- on the Academy/Trust website

13. Contact details for external organisations if not satisfied with the outcomes of the complaints procedure in full.



- If you have any queries regarding any aspect of the complaints procedure, please direct these to the Trust Clerk vtownsend@pendleeducationtrust.co.uk

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the school's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by the school. The DfE will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint, but will intervene if a school or trust has:

- Breached a clause in its funding agreement
- Failed to act in line with its duties under education law
- Acted (or is proposing to act) unreasonably when exercising its functions

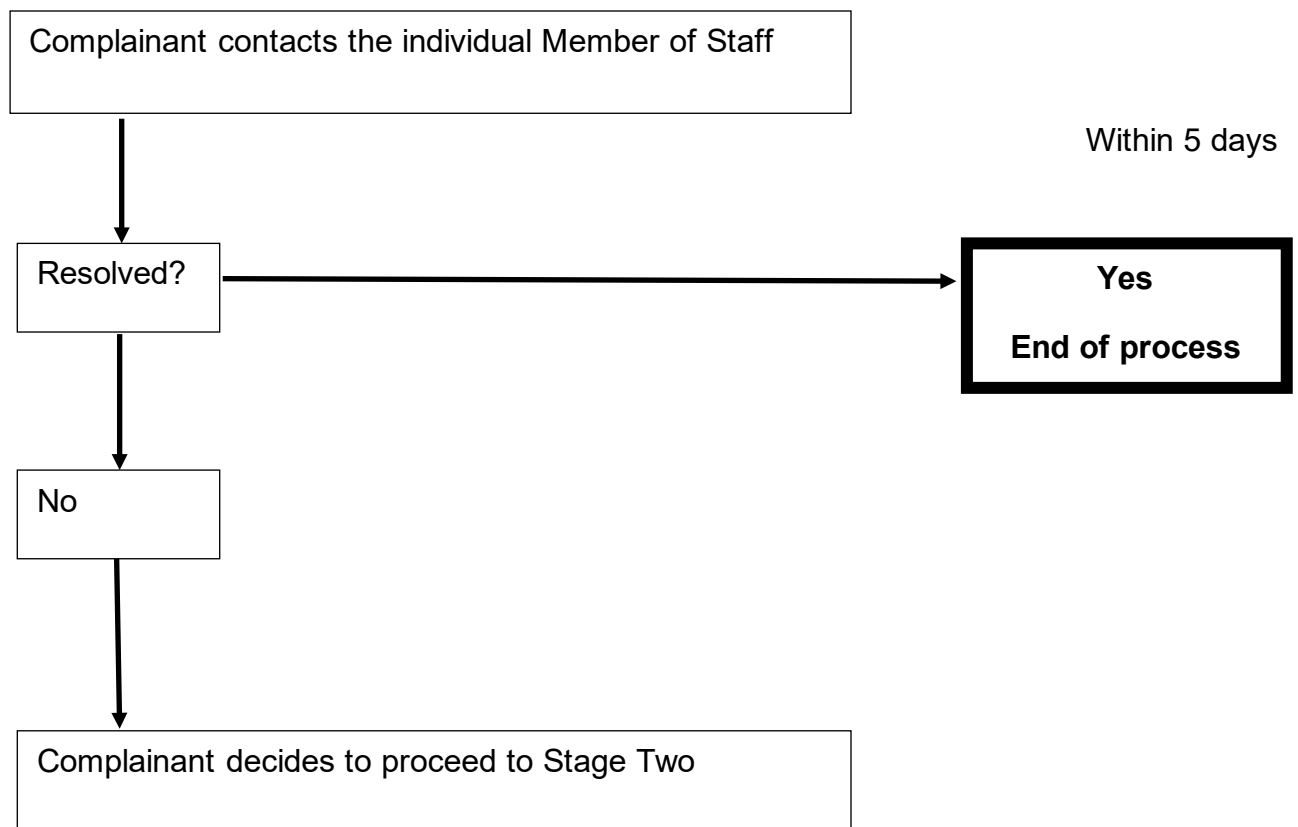
If the school's complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the school will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

For more information or to refer a complaint, see the following webpage:
<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

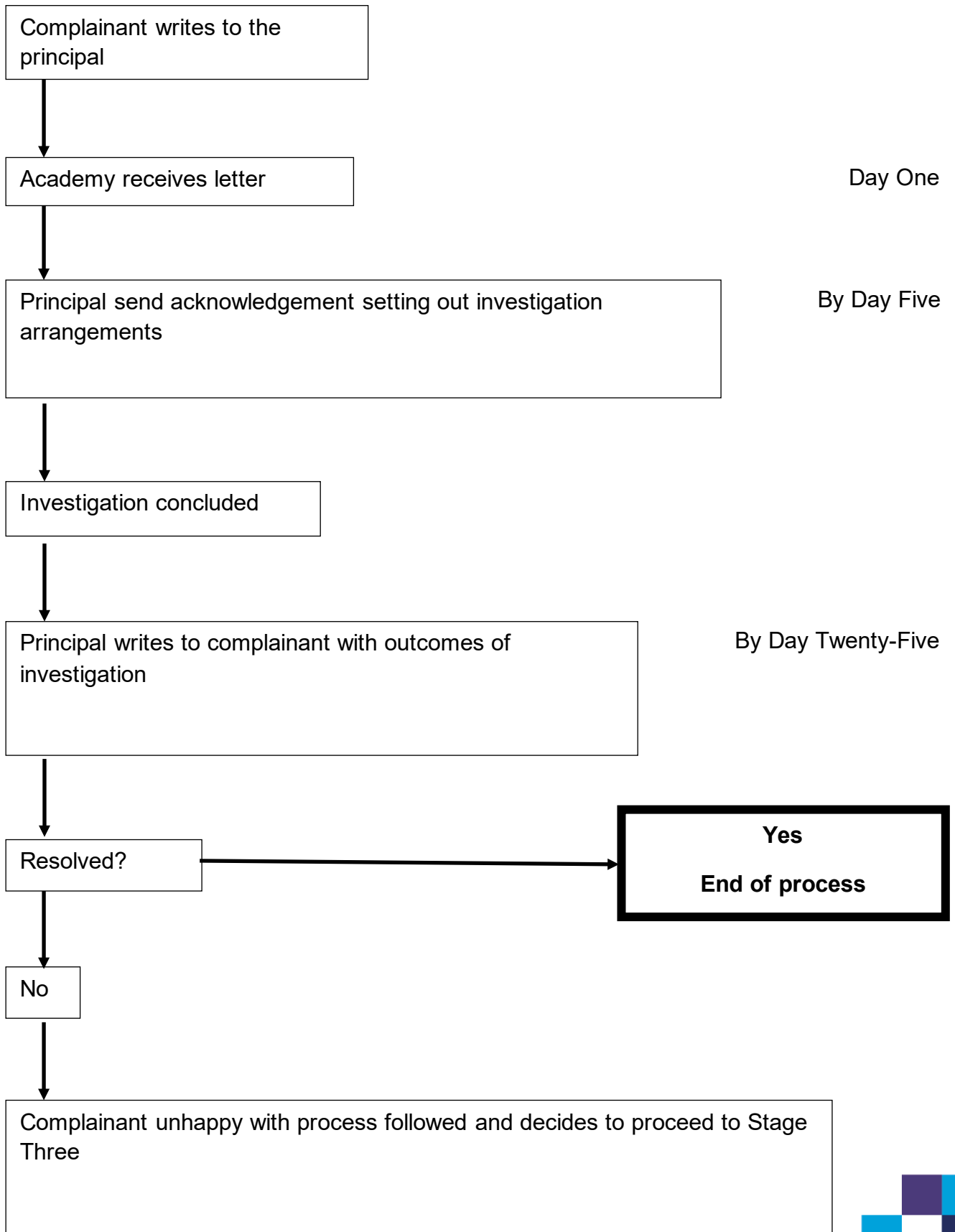
We will include this information in the outcome letter to complainants.



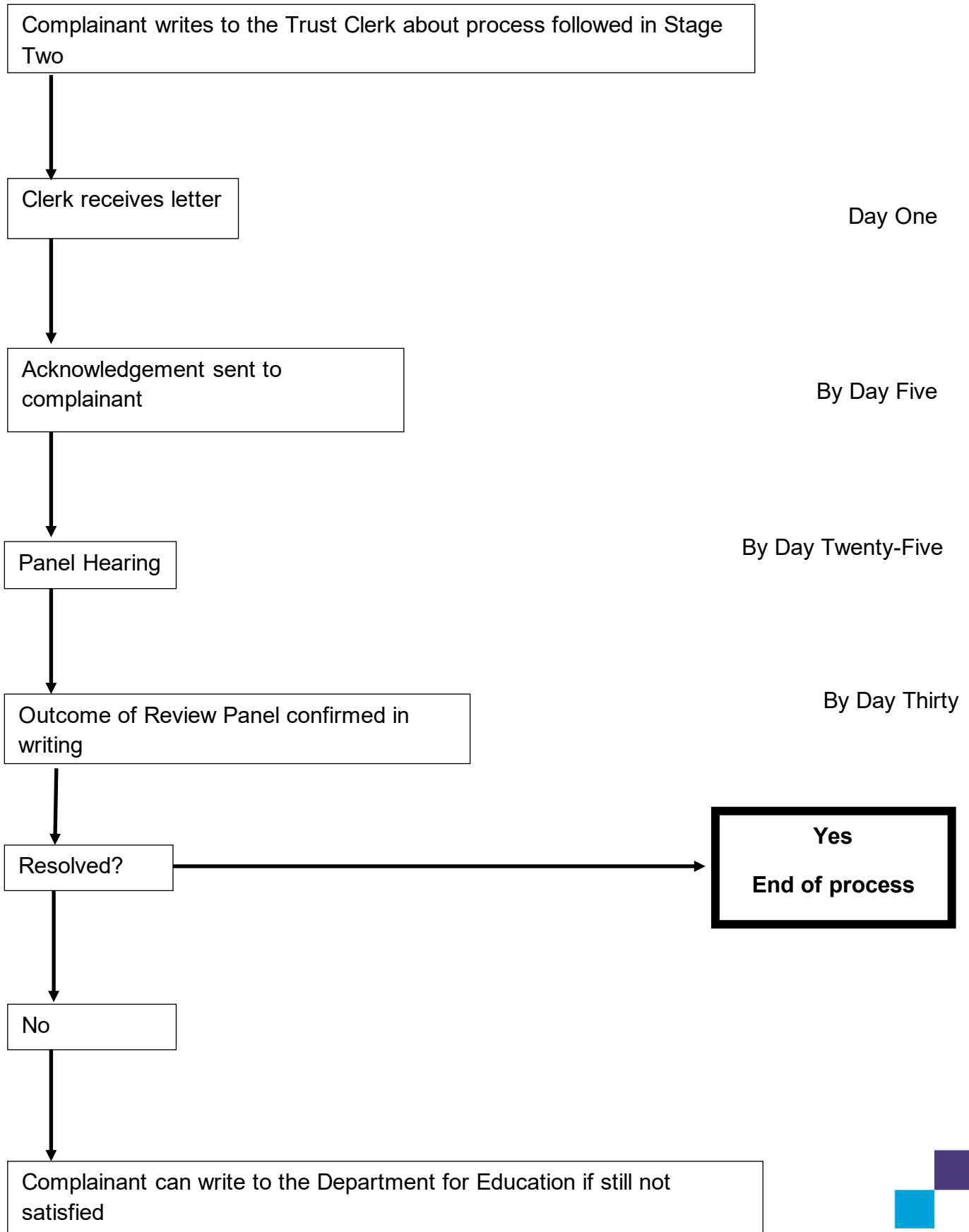
Model Complaints Procedure for Pendle Education Trust Academies
Stage One - talk to us



Stage Two – write to us



Stage Three – meet with a review panel



Something gone wrong? Let us know

Your name:	Pupil name:
Your relationship to the pupil:	Pupil date of birth:
Address and postcode:	Daytime phone:
	Evening phone:
	Email:
What are you concerned about? Include the names of any people involved and the dates and times of relevant events.	
Who have you spoken to at the school or trust about your concerns?	
What can we do to help put things right?	
Signature:	Date:

